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Using Narrative Research to Explore the Welcoming of Newcomer Immigrants: A Methodological Reflection on a Community-Based Research Project

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Key words:

community-based
research; narrative
methods;
immigration;
integration

Abstract: In this article, we examine the use of a narrative approach to a community-based action research project that sought to support welcoming initiatives for immigrant newcomers in a mid-size city in Ontario, Canada. We employed a place-based lens to situate the insights of community stakeholders as representatives of local organizations and government and in their everyday lives in the city. We reflect critically on whether the narrative approach we devised fostered a dialogical, collaborative, and critical orientation that action research advances, by evaluating the way the project was designed and implemented. We argue that a narrative approach provides valuable avenues to situate community-based action research in the multi-leveled context of research production and elicits the multi-layered elements of meaning-making that are often overly simplified, particularly in positivist approaches.

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1. Introduction

The integration of immigrants in Canada is supported by a policy infrastructure, an immigrant settlement sector, and a national framework of official multiculturalism. While Canada's largest cities are characterized by the diversity that immigration has engendered, a recent immigrant integration policy called "Welcoming Communities Initiatives" encourages the settlement of immigrants in smaller cities across the country. Welcoming Communities Initiatives (WCI) support locally-focused strategies to welcome and include immigrant newcomers in a range of communities, which vary in their capacity to include immigrant newcomers (ANDREW, BILES, BURSTEIN, ESSES & TOLLEY, 2012; VATZ-LAAROUSSI & WALTON-ROBERTS, 2005; WIGINTON, 2013; WULFF,

CARTER, VINEBERG & WARD, 2008). WCI forges a research environment well suited to community-based action research given its focus on engaging welcoming locally. [1]

Action and participatory research is characterized by epistemological orientations that are critical of the positivist paradigm which government policy often favors. In action and participatory approaches, truths are viewed as co-constructed or contested (JOHANSSON & LINDHULT, 2008), but not objectively determined. Committed to "democratic praxis" (JANES, 2016, p.75), researchers engage in collaborative relationships with stakeholders, community partners, and/or marginalized groups to provoke or advance strategies for change, mobilization, or action (BERGOLD & THOMAS, 2012; COOK, 2012; JOHANSSON & LINDHULT, 2008; McKENNA & MAIN, 2013). Action and participatory research approaches are diverse in their epistemologies, degrees of participation, theories of change (BERGOLD & THOMAS, 2012; COOK, 2012; JOHANSSON & LINDHULT, 2008), and use of specific methods (GERGEN & GERGEN, 2015), but overall such constructionist approaches bring a critical perspective to hegemonic accounts, including the way knowledge is embedded in social, cultural, and discursive relations. [2]

Community-based research is often conducted in a context where funding formulas and governmental mandates favor positivist frameworks to yield objective truths, measurable outcomes, and recommendations that conform to policy initiatives. The transformational potential and engagement of participants can be lost in this process (COOK, 2012; DILLON, 2014). While the policy climate of Welcoming Communities Initiatives is conducive to community-based action and participatory initiatives, focused as it is on engaging smaller cities and communities, it also favors outcomes that prefigure and potentially undermine its transformative potential. [3]

In this article, we examine the use of a narrative approach to a community-based action research project that sought to support welcoming initiatives for immigrant newcomers in a mid-size city in Ontario, Canada. The purpose of the study was to identify how community organizations engaged with immigrant newcomers and whether the city as a place forged a welcoming environment. We employed a place-based, multi-method approach to narrative that situated individual interviews of stakeholders and immigrant newcomers in the local context to elicit shared and contested meanings regarding immigrants, belonging, and the welcoming character of the city. Through the analysis of a local newspaper, we also examined local media accounts as storytellers of neighborhoods (BALL-ROKEACH, KIM & MATEI, 2001) to identify dominant depictions of immigrants and the city. Interviews with community stakeholders examined how they engage with immigrants in their places of work, neighborhoods, and social relations, and how they understood immigrants, the city, and its welcoming qualities. We employed focus groups and interviews with newcomer immigrants to elicit their experiences and express their attachments to the social domains that make up their daily life in the city (GEORGE, SELIMOS & KU, 2017). [4]

The place-based narrative approach we employed rendered visible the different, contested, and shared ways that communities and resident stakeholders understood and practiced welcoming and settlement. By doing so, it invited stakeholders to reflect critically on their own place in the city to identify connections and gaps between policy practices and the everyday ways belonging and welcoming are forged. It opened avenues for rendering immigrant integration a dynamic and substantive process. In the next section, we summarize the policy backdrop to welcoming initiatives. We then turn to the way a narrative approach provided avenues to foster participatory and transformational elements to the project. This is followed by an outline of the local context, a description of the project's evolution, and the conceptual framework we employed. We then turn to public narratives of the city and narrative interviews with community stakeholders. Finally, we evaluate the project and its narrative elements in the discussion section. [5]

2. Background to the Research Project

2.1 Policy context

In Canada, immigrant settlement is a substantial social service sector that includes an array of community-based voluntary organizations, agencies, and governmental programs. The sector provides services, resources, training, and support for immigrant newcomers across the country. In the early 2000s, the settlement sector grew in its capacity to support and deliver services for immigrant newcomers. The terms and conditions of funding changed to produce a more service-oriented sector that focused on immigrant labor market integration (ACHESON, 2012; VERONIS, 2013). An increase in funding to settlement enhanced the delivery of settlement services and new funding arrangements engendered professionalization and capacity building amongst settlement service providers, turning settlement into a "para-state system" (ACHESON & LaFOREST, 2013, p.606). [6]

The development of a settlement sector coincided with a broader shift in the character, funding, and mandates of voluntary and civil society organizations (ACHESON, 2012). As funding opportunities increased for organizations to provide settlement services, ethnic organizations—which often represented and advocated for specific immigrant groups—were marginalized from government programs. Some community organizations, many of which have a broad mandate and offer multiple services, drew on increased access to funding to enhance their settlement services. The "patterns of engagement" (ACHESON & LaFOREST, 2013, p.606) that emerged between governmental agencies, community organizations (which provide an array of services to multiple social groups), settlement organizations (which focus more on diversity and services for immigrants), and ethnic organizations marginalized the latter. Overall, the emergence of a settlement sector formalized practices and service delivery at the community level and de-politicized their engagement by diminishing their role in advocacy. [7]

"Welcoming Communities Initiatives" were introduced in the mid-2000s to enhance and localize the co-ordination of settlement services and to encourage the settlement of new immigrants to mid-sized and smaller cities. Local immigration partnerships—community-based networks of organizations, agencies, and municipal, provincial, and federal governmental departments—emerged to coordinate these initiatives and to develop community capacity for immigrant settlement and integration across the country. Through local immigration partnerships, a range of community stakeholders forged varied relationships to immigrant newcomers, settlement services, and the services and resources that permeate a specific locale. Thus, with the introduction of "Welcoming Community Initiatives," a complex, fluid, and shifting set of arrangements and resources across departments, agencies, and various levels of government brought a diversity of community experts to bear on the issue of welcoming immigrant newcomers. [8]

2.2 Local context: Windsor, Ontario

The site of our study—Windsor, Ontario, Canada—is a mid-sized immigrant-receiving Canadian city that borders Detroit, Michigan (USA). Characterized as a blue-collar auto-manufacturing town, it has a history of economic struggle and a diverse migration history that has rendered it a significant immigrant receiving city in the country. As an exemplar of Canadian multiculturalism, it is a "hyper-diverse" (HARRIS, 2013) city, where First Nations (aboriginal peoples) were supplanted by waves of European immigrants (British, French, Italians, Greeks); Eastern Europeans, Lebanese and more recently diverse Asian, African and especially Middle Eastern immigrants (GEORGE et al., 2017). Between 2006 and 2011, immigrants arrived from the United States, Iraq, China, India, Philippines, Pakistan, and Haiti. The agricultural industry is a significant sector in the rural environs, drawing heavily on immigrant labor and temporary foreign workers from Mexico and Jamaica (BASOK, 2004). In the city and surrounding region, the settlement sector provides programs and services to support newcomer settlement needs and build their capacity, i.e., language classes, orientation and citizenship programs, and employment assistance. [9]

Funded by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada¹, the Windsor Essex Local Immigration Partnership (WE LIP) was formed in 2009 to engage stakeholders in a strategic planning process to enhance welcoming and immigrant inclusion. At the time, the lead researchers of this project conducted an initial benchmark study on the settlement sector in Windsor (GEORGE & KU, 2012). They noted then the way immigrants had been discursively constructed in local narratives (in both local media and in interviews) about the character and future of the city. An influx of asylum seekers to Windsor in the mid-2000s had incited public debate over the region's capacity to integrate newcomer immigrants and spurred efforts to improve immigrant settlement. [10]

1 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is a Federal government department that provides services and funding to support immigrant settlement. It facilitates the arrival of immigrants, provides protection to refugees, grants citizenship, and issues travel documents to Canadians.

For the subsequent project addressed here, the lead researchers were invited to partner with WE LIP (which had grown to include a wide range of community organizations) and two settlement agencies to advance the welcoming capacity of the city and surrounding region. The funder, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, supported community-based participatory projects designed to target a group, issue, or fill a needed service gap, and to build engagement around that objective. The funder did not fund pure research and expected outcomes to be delivered to the community in a limited timeframe. Although WE LIP crafted several strategic welcoming initiatives, we were asked to address Strategic Objective 3—Strengthening Local Awareness and Capacity to Integrate Immigrants (see WE LIP, 2013, p.11). It took several meetings between researchers and community partners to narrow this broad topic into a manageable project. Firstly, we distinguished welcoming as a dynamic process that should enhance inclusion. We sought to identify how immigrants were included beyond the settlement sector: in the social, economic and institutional domains of city life and the cultural fabric of the city and its environs. From our perspective, "awareness" signified more than knowledge about immigrants. Rather, it implied a reflexive understanding of the self in relation to other residents, stakeholders, immigrants, and the city. [11]

Since Welcoming Community Initiatives seek to bring an array of community and municipal stakeholders to the welcoming process (ESSES, HAMILTON, BENNETT-ABUAYYASH & BURSTEIN, 2010), we sought a design that foregrounded the distinct position of settlement experts², as well as the diversity and relative expertise of a broad range of community stakeholders—community experts, service providers, organization representatives or directors. Service providers, stakeholders, and community experts play key roles in our understanding of social issues and groups who are the target of service provision and support. These actors often comprise the community component of community-based action and participatory research and their perspectives beg complex understanding and analysis. They are community participants who often have local, grounded, and empathetic understandings of the people and issues they serve (BRIGHAM, BAILLIE ABIDI, TASTSOGLOU & LANGE, 2015; SETHI, 2013; WOOD & NEWBOLD, 2012). However, there is a tendency, particularly in positivist accounts, to look at key informants or community experts for truths over multiple perspectives and meanings (McKENNA & MAIN, 2013). Service providers and community experts tend to be treated as a single voice and can be prominent actors in participatory research without attending to the different vulnerabilities and pressures they face in relation to clients or the population under study (TRUE, ALEXANDER & RICHMAN, 2011). The effect is to produce simplified truths about a given people or topic in ways that inhibit transformation, re-other, or re-codify relations of power and the conditions through which the problem, the vulnerability, or the social group is constituted. Still, the insights of individual service providers can provide useful starting points to acquire city-wide

2 Within these community-based local immigration partnerships, settlement sector workers have emerged as a specific type of community expert: notably individuals who work with immigrant newcomers in service delivery and who may work in a settlement agency, in schools, in municipal departments, or in multi-service organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

perspectives on immigrants and to advance a re-invention of place (ABRAHAM, 2014; CLEVENGER, SERAPHIA DERR, CADGE & CURRAN, 2014). [12]

We sought a reflexive interview process, to understand not only what stakeholders knew about but also how they understood immigrants in relation to themselves. We wanted to explore the social, cultural, and economic features that supported, or alternatively hindered, immigrant inclusion and attachment. We sought to incorporate the insights of immigrant newcomers in the welcoming process. In sum, we aimed for a methodological approach that would move beyond an audit of services or an analysis of expert opinion on the barriers and opportunities the city and its environs offered for immigrants. These objectives led us to a place-based and narratively-oriented approach: to elicit contested meanings of place in ways that were reflexive, dialogical, and sensitive to the concerns of our community-based partners; to provoke critical discussions about the meaning of welcoming and the dynamics of immigrant belonging in the region. [13]

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Design

A narrative approach—constructionist in orientation (ESIN, FATHI & SQUIRE, 2014)—is a methodological research strategy that foregrounds the meaning and content of stories, often through personal accounts. Narrative is also employed to analyze stories that comprise public and cultural domains to explore shared cultural meanings, norms, and collective practices (CARTER & BOLDEN, 2012). A narrative approach analyzes the content of stories, how stories are told, and the way people narrate their experiences (ESIN et al., 2014) to produce accounts that have a "temporal," "spatial," and "sequential ordering" (KOHLENER RIESSMAN, 2012, p.369). Narrative analysis attends to contexts (ESIN et al., 2014; KOHLER RIESSMAN, 2012) as richly layered sources of meaning-making which may include the research process, the social and historical context (ESIN et al., 2014), and the reflexive positioning of the researcher. The actor-centered character of a narrative approach seeks to explore the complexities of meaning-making, which renders it an effective strategy in projects that advance consensus, contestation, change, and transparent dialogical action research (COLOMBO, 2003). [14]

The narrative approach we took attended to both personal and public registers of storytelling to situate personal narratives of stakeholders in the context of welcoming in the city. Informed by our training in ethnography, the project attended to how people are situated in places, where meanings and everyday stories are localized, but nested in wider social-cultural norms and relations (ELLIKER, COETZEE & KOTZE, 2013). Our study conceptualized cities as places that encompass both their physical characteristics and "the relationships we have with the people we share those places with and the activities we undertake there" (MAY, 2013, p.142). Individuals develop attachments to place depending on their everyday activities, social relations, and how their personal biographies and experiences mix with shared imaginaries in ways that elicit feelings of belonging. Residents feel a sense of belonging when they recognize

themselves and participate in the social, cultural, and material practices of a place (GEORGE et al., 2017; MASSEY, 2005). Thus, feelings of belonging are related to social exclusion, a multidimensional process that can deny certain people access to full participation in normatively prescribed activities or other them, so they do not recognize themselves in the cultural or symbolic features that constitute a place (GEORGE et al., 2017). Places, therefore, produce contradictory effects: belonging is enhanced when we have a sense of our right to participate in the social, cultural, and material practices of a place (ESSES et al. 2010; MAY, 2013). [15]

We employed a place-based narrative approach by identifying three narrative registers to elicit a range of meanings around welcoming, belonging, immigrant integration, multiculturalism, and diversity in the city: 1. public narratives of the city and the place of immigrants within those narratives; 2. individual narratives of research participants, including community stakeholders and newcomer immigrants, and 3. the dialogical orientation of the project itself. To access these registers, the study drew on recommendations of our community partners: an analysis of local media representations of the city, immigration, and multiculturalism; interviews with settlement workers and sector-specific community stakeholders; and interviews and focus groups with newcomer immigrants and refugees. While the third narrative register was more implicit, it informed the way the project was designed, implemented, and disseminated. [16]

Media and interview data were coded separately, each at the primary level to identify events and vernacular themes as they emerged in the narrative and then at the secondary-analytic level to identify narrative dimensions and prominent themes and differences across narratives (TRACEY, 2013). We categorized and charted, for example, stakeholders in relation to the sector they represented and compared media depictions with stakeholder and newcomer insights to identify whether prominent themes, norms, and depictions of immigrants and the city were shared, reproduced and/or contested in interviews. To foster trustworthiness, all four members of the research team conducted interviews which were transcribed and read by all team members. Each researcher created summaries of their interviews, which were then shared amongst the team. The summaries described the interview setting, how the conversation progressed, general impressions, and major insights and themes that emerged from each interview. With media and interviews, we were interested in how events were recounted; how the subjects of a media story or interview were positioned or positioned themselves as protagonists or villains, agents or victims; the contradictions within stories and across them; and the normative assumptions espoused, including the way macro and public narratives facilitated, framed, and constrained meaning (ESIN et al., 2014). The analysis was developed in stages, through bi-monthly meetings with the research team, and bi-monthly meetings with our community-based partners. Through these meetings, we developed a strategy and process for disseminating our research and engaging the community in welcoming immigrant newcomers. [17]

4. Public Narratives of the City: Media Analysis

We employed an ethnographic approach to our media analysis that encouraged a reflexive approach to media as part of the social worlds of our research participants (ALTHEIDE & SCHNEIDER, 2013). Through an analysis of local media, we sought to capture public narratives of the city and the depiction of immigrants in the city's social imaginary. Local media, while informed by national discourses in "the circuit of communication encounters" (FINNEY & ROBINSON, 2008, p.399), are the storytellers of neighborhoods (BALL-ROKEACH et al., 2001), "cultural representation[s]" that foster emplacement and a sense of living in a particular place through which a reading public "experience[s] and share[s] the local" (BUCHANAN, 2009, p.63). As such, local media play the role as a "community institution" (FINNEY & ROBINSON, 2008, p.398); they produce local identities and moral boundaries of the community in ways that define who does or does not belong (see also SHAH, McLEOD & YOON, 2001). Previous research in Canada, moreover, suggests that local media representations of immigrants significantly shaped the context of welcoming (ESSES et al., 2010). [18]

While we identified a range of cultural and news media (including novels and radio) that circulated in the city, we focused our media analysis on the Windsor Star, the city and surrounding region's only daily newspaper. The Windsor Star is an important agenda-setter and circulator of local information and knowledge, symbolized by its central location in Windsor's downtown core. Our community partners viewed the Windsor Star as a major player in circulating information about immigration and remarked that its depiction of immigrants and immigrant issues in the city could be improved. We were interested in how individual news stories when taken together produced dominant narratives of the city, of its origins and historical character, its current struggles and visions of its future. [19]

To capture public narratives of the city we first conducted a headline analysis of the newspaper's front page and local sections (January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2012), a period coinciding with the release of the 2006 Canadian census. From this analysis, we constructed seven hypothetical weeks, with each week corresponding to one of the seven years in our timeframe, and then collected all the front page and local section articles corresponding to each week (see BUCHANAN 2009). In total, 254 articles were collected. Full-length articles were then collected and subjected to thematic, narrative, and discourse analysis (see ALTHEIDE & SCHNEIDER, 2013). Initially, we searched for themes within and across individual events. We then examined how events were narrated, including how Windsor as a place was characterized in these accounts, what local identities were associated with the place, and how protagonists were depicted. A discursive approach examines how specific elements of a story are "enmeshed in a context of other assumptions" (p.116) to produce, for example, a discourse of fear and othering towards immigrants or visions of the future. "Discursive tracking" (p.115) allowed us to identify the recurrence of these symbolic representations and whether they traversed specific accounts. [20]

The most prominent narrative depicted Windsor as a city in transition, its economic decline a backdrop to the imperative of globalization. Local identities were forged through narratives of globalization centering on the struggles of two traditional protagonists: labor and business. Windsorites (a term that residents use in everyday parlance) were depicted as victims of unemployment, deindustrialization, American dominance, and the social problems that borders engender. But Windsorites were also framed as key agents of revitalization, divided by labor-corporate struggles that cast unions as luddites in a narrative of change that is unilinear and inevitable. Despite its rich immigrant history, immigrants, issues of diversity, and multiculturalism were largely absent from these local representations. [21]

To generate media accounts that addressed immigration, we engaged in a second stage of more purposeful data collection. Firstly, a keyword search for "multiculturalism," "immigrant," and "refugee" generated 554 editorials, commentaries, and opinion pieces. These pieces were analyzed to consider how multiculturalism, immigration and refugee migration was framed in relation to local understandings of Windsor as a place. While most editorial, commentaries and opinion pieces dealt with questions of immigration and diversity at the national level, three local events sparked significant debate in the local newspaper regarding immigrants, refugees, and cultural diversity in the city. The arrival of 200 Mexican and Haitian asylum seekers in the fall of 2007, whose claims for asylum sparked an attention to settlement issues, garnered significant news-play. Their arrival provoked concern over Windsor's capacity to support their integration. Letters to the editor questioned the legitimacy of the asylum seekers' claims for refugee status and the capacity of Windsor to welcome them, especially when long-term residents were suffering economic hardships themselves. Discussions of the event reproduced discourses that frame immigrants and refugees in Canada as "system drains" or "que jumpers." These depictions were inflected and magnified by intense and ongoing local concerns over factory closures and unemployment levels. Some, however, commented on the need to support the asylum seekers, appealing to Windsor's and Canada's multiculturalism and legacy of welcoming immigrants. In this way, the arrival of Mexican and Haitian asylum seekers exposed the tensions among immigration, economic struggle, and Windsor's identity as a city. [22]

Two incidents sparked similar responses and contestations: the erection of a billboard featuring high ranking Hezbollah officials to commemorate families who fought against Israeli military forces during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon crisis, and the University of Windsor Student's Alliance's (UWSA) decision to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to protest Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories. Both incidents were largely framed as immigrants bringing homeland conflicts to Canada and promoting anti-Semitism, in direct clash with Canadian values. These depictions exemplified the overall representation of certain immigrants—namely Muslims—as unassimilable, posing a considerable threat to Canadian values, and taking advantage of Canada's generosity (KARIM, 2008). [23]

In sum, the presence of diverse groups was narrated in multiple and contested ways: as a historical and contemporary reality, as a site of celebration, and as a site of potential alarm and discord. Certain types of immigrants were welcomed, namely those with the capacity to enhance Windsor's economic revitalization, while others were represented as a threat to Windsor's ability to protect and sustain itself against global forces and economic uncertainties. Narrative tropes used to frame immigrants and refugees to Windsor (as system drains, unassimilable, threatening to Canadian values, potential economic contributors, etc.) corresponded closely to dominant discourses of immigrants, immigration, and multiculturalism in national news outlets. However, these tropes were grafted onto local understandings of Windsor as a place. When taken together, the effect was to silo immigrants from aspirations of the city and to include immigrants in specific ways that either othered them or reproduced nation-building narratives of Canada as a multicultural place. [24]

5. Narrative Interviews with Community Stakeholders

We interviewed 73 community stakeholders sourced from business improvement associations, community revitalization groups, local employers, post-secondary educational institutions, ethno-cultural organizations, hospitals, community-based health organizations, settlement agencies, legal and social services, union/labor organizations, and economic and workforce development agencies. Since this project was directed to the wider community, it was important to elicit meanings of welcoming, belonging, and understandings of immigrants for community stakeholders not only as experts but as residents themselves. Our interview guide encouraged the interviewer/participant to build participant "stock of knowledge" (HOLSTEIN & GUBRIUM, 1995), to open avenues for stakeholders to draw out narrative linkages between their personal histories and their relationships as residents to the city and/or its rural surroundings. Stakeholders were probed to discuss what they did (their work) and the interviewer elicited narrative responses by drawing on social domains (neighborhood, family, leisure) to trace their experiences, connections, and engagement with immigrants. Stakeholders reflected on immigrants, their presence in the social domains in which stakeholders were embedded, the city more generally, and their own sense of belonging. This approach extended welcoming beyond a focus of policy practice to foster a more diverse and place-based approach to welcoming as a dynamic process in which residents and immigrants engage. It enabled us to activate the narratives from community experts in ways that encouraged reflection on their relationship to immigrants beyond their roles as experts and service providers. [25]

A thematic analysis of stakeholder interviews revealed important distinctions between the knowledge which settlement workers and non-settlement stakeholders had of newcomer immigrants and their challenges. Settlement workers described the barriers and challenges that newcomer immigrants faced. They were empathetic and described immigrant settlement strategies from the perspective of immigrant newcomers. They viewed immigrants as very diverse, who as a group shared significant struggles, but who also held enormous potential as economic and social resources who could advance revitalization of

the city. By comparison, stakeholders not involved in settlement, while supportive of immigrant newcomers, demonstrated varied but overall limited engagement with immigrants interpersonally and within the organizations they represented. The needs or experiences of immigrant newcomers were unevenly and often thinly incorporated into most agencies or organizations that addressed social, health and economic needs in the city. [26]

Narrative analysis explores the way participants position themselves in relation to social domains and relations in emergent and at times contradictory ways (SELLERBERG & LEPPANEN, 2012) to elicit, in this case, their accounts of the city, their social attachments, and sense of belonging to the city. We identified the way cultural practices and norms were produced to operate as both resources and constraints (CARTER & BOLDEN, 2012) in these accounts (see also GEORGE & SELIMOS, 2017). How did they communicate their attachment to the city and did they reproduce images of the city found in newspaper accounts? How were immigrants included, excluded and talked about? How was cultural difference communicated and in what ways did it correspond to or contradict dominant narratives of multiculturalism and tolerance? Did participants relate and understand immigrants differently and in a consistent or contradictory way as they shifted positions in their accounts from service providers to residents? [27]

Stakeholders' accounts demonstrated a shifting back and forth between their own experiences and those of immigrants. Often, their attitudes toward immigrants were framed by their own sense of belonging and advocacy—of whether and how the city, its residents, and institutions needed to change. In this way, stakeholders reflected critically on the city and its diversity. Furthermore, stakeholders were largely employed in agencies and organizations that embedded them in existing networks to produce a range of identifications and belonging to the city. Their job-related attachments, while varied, were thickened by the past, as most had either been raised in Windsor or lived there for a long time, providing them with peers, friends, and relatives. Such connections produced a varied sense of attachment and belonging to the city as a place: from a substantial minority who strongly identified as Windsorites to a significant cluster who were ambivalent and critical about the city and their sense of belonging to it. [28]

Take for example, Julia³, an immigrant and engineer from Eastern Europe who retrained to work with immigrants. Julia felt quite welcomed in Windsor. She attributed her ability to pass into white Canadian culture to her European heritage and distinguished herself from racialized immigrants who struggled to be accepted. In contrast, Joy, a social worker raised elsewhere in Canada, did not feel particularly integrated due to her thin attachments to the city. As an employee and resident, Joy described very limited engagement with immigrants but identified events where cultural diversity is celebrated in the city. Her understanding of exclusion, however, was framed by family experiences with disability. As her narrative proceeded, she extended this sense of exclusion to immigrants, to create an imaginary where valuing differences more broadly

3 This research underwent ethics review with the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. All names included here are pseudonyms.

included immigrants and people with disabilities. Joy's narrative conveyed the celebratory orientation to diversity prominent in national depictions of multiculturalism that is not necessarily critical but open to how we might think differently about welcoming. In contrast, Rachel, a Canadian-born black woman, positioned issues of immigrant welcoming explicitly within the larger context of racism and racial exclusion. She identified her own experience of racism and the overall "absence" of cultural and racial diversity in seats of everyday and formal leadership in the city to provide a more critical assessment of welcoming, multiculturalism, and diversity. [29]

There were many stakeholders who were immigrants or from immigrant families. They drew on their own experiences or those of their family to reflect critically on the challenges immigrants faced in Windsor. Lorenzo, a municipal worker and second-generation Italian, conveyed a sympathetic but detached and managerial approach to immigrants through most of his interview until the end of his narrative when his personal memories were activated. He recalled the mundane ways that cultural distinctions engendered his own childhood humiliations. Raised in a white, Anglo town he described how kids ridiculed his daily lunches: large meatball sandwiches that contrasted with the white sandwich bread that most kids brought to school. Maria, a mental health professional, had some contact with immigrants through her work, but she drew on her own Italian-immigrant heritage to reflect on how immigrants were partially welcomed and excluded in the city. She pointed to the need for culturally sensitive approaches in healthcare and trauma and the problems of cultural stereotyping. She modeled the building of inclusion through social connections that she experienced through her Italian friends and relations. Maria distinguished her sense of belonging to the city (strong and embedded in her own sub-community) from the exclusions that inhibited immigrant attachments. Anil, born in India, was trained as a mechanical engineer but now manages a medical clinic and volunteers for an ethno-cultural community organization. He drew on his own settlement challenges to make sense of the welcoming nature of Windsor, particularly the systemic barriers that newcomer immigrants face in finding employment. The lack of information on how to find work was "confusing and scattered" and deskilling remains a reality for many immigrants which produces powerful feelings of isolation and disappointment. [30]

When taken together, interviews allowed us to map how dominant national ideas of diversity, multiculturalism, immigration, integration, welcoming, and belonging were produced, contested, and localized. Diversity and multiculturalism emerge as reference points nested in stakeholder explanations. Some conveyed a conventional approach to diversity as an expression of Canadian multicultural discourse, one where cultural diversity is viewed as a celebration of ethnic difference, but confined by terms of tolerance that subordinates ethnic cultural difference. Others, however, critically reflected on the limitations of multicultural discourse, particularly in the way it did not account for racial difference or racism in the city. Stakeholders had diverse and multi-layered understandings of diversity (as reflected in Joy's account). In some cases, there were discrepancies between views of multiculturalism (as largely positive) and immigrants (cautious). As

Lorenzo's narrative showed, some immigrants become naturalized in ways that support multicultural diversity, but somehow erase connections to immigration. Stakeholders' views of welcoming were informed, moreover, by their own personal experiences of welcoming. These narratives communicated the complex and often uneven nature of inclusion and exclusion in the city. For example, a valuable reference point for welcoming emerged in several accounts where temporary migrant workers, who are numerically prominent in the area but were excluded from the project's policy objectives, were identified as people who were either unwelcome or unfairly excluded and, therefore, as having no right to belong. By presenting these diverse stories, we hoped to provoke more substantial discussion about immigrant integration, its relationship to social exclusion, and the types of actions needed to forge a more welcoming place. [31]

In interviews conducted with 140 immigrant newcomers (aged 16 to 82), which we do not discuss here, Windsor was depicted as a relatively welcoming place which offered valuable and much needed settlement services. Importantly, however, most immigrant newcomers identified an absence of deeper engagement with "real" Canadians. This siloing was, we argued, fostered by neighborhood segregation, limited transportation and the challenges of finding employment, which limited their inclusion and ability to cultivate wider social ties (GEORGE et al., 2017). In the next section, we consider how the narrative components, when taken together forge a picture of welcoming that attends to its broader scope: to engage stakeholders more deeply and extend the welcoming process. We then evaluate whether such a design contributes to the dialogical and transformative components of its community-based orientation. [32]

6. Discussion

The purpose of our community-based study was to identify how community organizations engaged with immigrant newcomers; how stakeholders interpreted immigrants; and whether the city as a place forged a welcoming environment to support immigrant belonging. We used a narrative approach to broaden the dialogue and draw stakeholders into the welcoming process. [33]

When taken together, public and personal narratives forge a place-based understanding of the city and its residents. The newspaper analysis, although partial, demonstrated that the city remains predominantly depicted by its historical characterization as an industrial border town. Immigrants are siloed from the way the city is depicted, particularly the visions of the future it produces. Rather, reference to immigrants, even when based on local events, reproduced broader national debates where immigrants are depicted as celebratory markers of national identity or as objects of threat and panic. These media depictions were somewhat reproduced by stakeholders. Views of immigrants, for example, were inflected with national narratives: multiculturalism framed the terms of immigrant belonging so that immigrants are both part of and yet distinct from Canadian national identifications. Moreover, views of the city were notably consistent across stakeholders, although they reproduced and contested whether these depictions of the city were valuable, true or useful for transforming it. [34]

Still, interviews conveyed critical perspectives that when taken together provided opportunities for deeper engagement in welcoming. The views of stakeholders about immigrants were complex, emerging from their own experience and the different ways they engaged in the city (i.e., as workers, neighbors, etc.). They conveyed multi-layered understandings of the city as a welcoming place, and many reflected upon, compared and distinguished their own sense of belonging to that of immigrants. The city was somewhat welcoming for some people; there were some serious issues of racialization and exclusion which set conditions for belonging and inhibited immigrant attachments. Stakeholders identified how the structural and funding climate informed their formal and personal engagement in welcoming. This was reflected in their different views of advocacy. For some, advocacy was an everyday orientation. It emerged more from a sense of commitment, their identifications and how they operate as people, than it did from the mandates of their jobs, which discouraged direct advocacy. Stakeholders identified how networks that could foster stronger engagement with the settlement sector were thwarted by employee turnover, developed by informal connections or enhanced by sustained and pro-active commitment and presence of key individuals. A narrative approach allowed stakeholders to make linkages that were not supported or were subverted by the formal welcoming process. The everyday support offered by churches and ethnic organizations, for example, were identified even though they are marginalized from formal settlement policy. [35]

While our project fostered valuable insights, it is important to critically evaluate the extent to which we were able to foreground a critical and action-based orientation. JOHANSSON and LINDHULT (2008) make a distinction within action research between a) pragmatic, consensus-based action-oriented approaches which advance clear strategies for change and b) critical orientations which emphasize contestation and provoke but do not necessarily advance directions for change. Our project did not offer strategies for direct change. Rather, following a critical orientation, it provided a structure, a process, and alternative ways of looking at immigrants, stakeholders and the city, to provoke community participants towards initiatives. A narrative perspective supported our efforts to be constructively critical in ways that opened possibilities for change and provoked contestations that could be mobilized to advance strategies. [36]

This orientation was reflected in a community forum which was structured to inform attendees about the research findings and to generate feedback, discussion and debate. The forum presented the main findings of our research to generate critical and reflective thinking from the forum participants, not only as service providers but as neighbors, peers and leaders in the city. Attended by 95 stakeholders (most of whom were not included in the study), the presentation was followed by small group brainstorming sessions where participants discussed findings and devised potential collaborative initiatives to enhance Windsor Essex's welcoming capacity. For instance, one small group discussion addressed local newspaper depictions of immigrants and refugees. Participants pointed to negative depictions of the Muslim community in the city (some participants were themselves part of the Muslim community). Lack of representation, flat portrayals, and misrepresentations of immigrants and immigration issues were viewed as

barriers to welcoming that required an ongoing campaign to improve local media portrayals of immigrants and newcomers. Participants developed a model for media engagement: create a working group within the LIP to monitor local media, write editorials about immigrant issues, and feed positive stories to the Windsor Star. [37]

In sum, a narrative approach, its conceptual tools and its constructionist orientation, helped us chart a collaborative, dialogical, and coherent project because it encouraged open-ended, dialogical interviewing and captured shared and contested meanings so that critiques of the city and welcoming emerge from within the community. A narrative approach oriented us to listen and engage with community partners with the recognition that we all held different perspectives. A narrative approach is also actor-centered, focused as it is on the interpretive capacities and richness of socially-situated and interconnected individuals. This orientation is crucial for maintaining key features of action and participatory research: reflexivity, transformation, and dialogue. [38]

However, critically oriented approaches to action research vary: post-structural, feminist, critical race, and/or Foucauldian insights share to some degree an open-ended approach to change and an orientation that is reflexive, socially situated, and attuned to the interrogation of authoritative and discursive accounts (GERGEN & GERGEN, 2015). Still, had we taken a more Foucauldian, genealogical orientation to the project and our narrative analysis (see TAMBOUKOU, 2011), the discursive conditions of the project and its production would be more apparent. Some Foucauldian insights go much further to interrogate how power is conceptualized in participatory action models and interrogate the conditions under which such research is constituted (DILLON, 2014; JANES, 2016). Such critiques are valuable as they direct us to the specific conditions under which action and participatory research is constituted as part of a larger governing rationale. Such critiques point, for example, to the way communities, a problem or a group of people who make up action research are inscribed into governmental regimes, funding arrangements and partnership mandates. Community-based projects such as ours are embedded in webs of power and governmental mechanisms that produce people and issues as objects of their management and our inquiry. The actor-centered approach that narrative encourages can, but does not necessarily, encourage a deep and critical reflection of the terms upon which the entire project is constituted. By employing de-constructive insights, we can critically assess how exclusions were built into our project in such a way that it reproduces relations of governing and our place as academic researchers and community partners in that process. [39]

To be reflexive, newcomer immigrants held a precarious and marginal place in the study itself, recruited as they were from settlement agencies. Their exclusion is partly related to the thrust of the project, funded as it was towards welcoming. It reflects the top-down approach to settlement and welcoming more generally and newcomers' relative marginality, struggling to orient themselves in a new place. Temporary foreign workers were excluded from the study. This type of migrant is a precarious worker whose terms of residence are determined by distinct policies

that were not included within the mandate of welcoming initiatives or newcomer settlement. Importantly, many research participants and community partners identified temporary foreign workers as a significant, visible, and marginalized group within the region. Their absence signals a significant limitation of the welcoming process and the hierarchies of belonging that mark Canadian immigration more broadly. These exclusions make us reluctant to characterize this study as participatory if by participatory we mean the inclusion of participants who are directly influenced by the policies and initiative we seek to change. [40]

As university educators with experience in working with voluntary organizations and advocacy (on feminist and immigrant related issues), we also occupied positions of privilege. Our critical insights on the governance rationale were at times at odds with community partners who were themselves embedded in governmental protocols: funding demands and mandates that placed them in different relations of power and constraint than us, and each other. Moreover, community partners required a certain amount of consensus in design and outcome to move forward despite the project's efforts to provoke contestation and debate. [41]

Ultimately, we characterize this project as community-based action research. But we would greatly qualify its participatory element. We see parallels with COOK's (2012) analysis of participatory research in the UK. Funding frameworks and partnership arrangements are significant determinants of these research initiatives that beg careful parsing in debate, which may inform and complicate the epistemic orientation of the project and prefigure its participatory elements. Community-based action projects may not only favor academic or community-based needs and agendas (COOK, 2012; HANSON & OGUNDE, 2016); but participation itself emerges from the complex interplay of community-academic arrangements which, when interrogated, reveal complex operations of power in which researchers and community partners are embedded and constrained. Indeed, the re-arrangement of voluntary and community-based agencies since the millennium, and their connections to multiple levels of government suggests that more nuanced and complex understandings of power are required to address the possibilities and constraints of doing community-based action research more generally. [42]

7. Conclusion

Foucauldian and other post-structural perspectives call for more dynamic, plural, and contingent orientations to action and participatory research that decenters power and attends to discursive ruptures, tensions, contingencies and contradictions to foreground contestations in knowledge production (HANSON & OGUNDE, 2016). These insights are important because they help us make sense of the complex community arrangements and relations of power at play in the context of settlement and immigration. The idea of welcoming itself begs much deeper attention than we provide here, as does the concept of community which assumes a homogeneity and fixity that belies relations of power. The place-based approach we took connotes emplacement, a particularity of time and space that is

well-suited to eliciting knowledge narratively. It implies that new projects will emerge, including those that we argue, should center newcomer immigrants and stakeholders together more extensively than we were able to do. [43]

The challenge of this type of research, moreover, is in how specificity is rendered scholarly significant given the positivist thrust of academic research towards generalization and replication. In our case, it is a matter of how to make the specificity of narrative accounts and the study's focus on localized meanings relevant to a wider academic audience. On a community level, this type of research is valuable because it provides important grounded knowledge and context to the understanding of an issue. From an academic perspective, however, the implications of this type of study are best viewed for their analytic contribution. There is an increased interest in localizing discourses with respect to immigration because it helps to comprehend how discourses that impact immigrant integration inform everyday practice (ABRAHAM, 2014). CLEVENGER et al. (2014) make similar arguments in their comparative analysis of immigrant integration discourses in two small cities in the US, reflecting that a shift to smaller cities and localization is not peculiar to Canada. [44]

Moreover, such analytic generalizations can be fruitful for other community-based action approaches. Narrative approaches can be incorporated into numerous studies where socially and culturally-situated frameworks are important, such as healthcare-related issues that attend to diverse populations. Given the degree to which community-based research involves service providers and community experts, narrative can help to build a dialogical process in ways that add fresh insights, alternate strategies, and/or challenge authoritative accounts in meaningful and constructive ways. [45]

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